Chapter 2

HISTORIC CONTEXT FRAMEWORK

A. OVERALL CONTEXT FRAMEWORK

The main occupation of the site spans the period *circa* 1812 to the mid-20th century, with the Boyd ownership extending to 1877. A formal period of significance of the site was not determined, but for the purpose of the submitted proposal (Appendix E) was assumed to encompass the period of the Boyd ownership. The site was considered under the following contextual themes from the Delaware Comprehensive Historic Preservation Plan (Ames *et al.* 1990, De Cunzo and Catts 1990a and 1990b, De Cunzo 2004):

1770-1830+/- Early Industrialization
1830-1880+/- Industrialization and Early Urbanization

Within these chronological periods this Upper Peninsula site was considered to have the potential to contribute to each of the following four research domains and associated themes identified in De Cunzo and Catts (1990a):

- Landscape (agriculture, retailing and wholesaling);
- Domestic Economy (agriculture, transportation and communication, settlement patterns and demographic change);
- Social Group Identity, Behavior and Interaction (transportation and communication, settlement patterns and demographic change); and
- Manufacturing and Trade (retailing and wholesaling).

B. INITIALLY IDENTIFIED RESEARCH THEMES AND CONTEXTS

The following research themes were identified at the project design stage on the basis of the Phase II information. Topics 2 and 3 were not pursued in the final research program. Topic 1 forms the major theme of the study, with some more limited contributions being made to Topic 4. Chapter 3 explains the modified approach to the historical research that was finally adopted. These topics are included here partly to identify them as possible future research themes in Delaware.

1. Stores and Merchants

Studies of the role of merchants and stores have figured quite prominently in the historical archaeological literature of Delaware. De Cunzo (2004) devotes almost 23% of her book on the historical archaeology of Delaware to this and closely related topics. She discusses the role of merchants in early American society, noting the existence of “merchant-farmers”, the community importance of merchants as “culture-brokers”, as brokers, patrons and mediators, providers of credit etc, and their key role in moving local products out to wider markets in an increasingly commercialized agricultural environment (De Cunzo 2004:3, 11, 15, 16, 18, etc.).

The Darrach Store site has been used as an example of the implementation of the state research plan for historical archaeology (De Cunzo and Catts 1990b:29-35), and the monographs of this site and the William Dickson Store provide a substantial body of research

information relevant to the Boyd's site (De Cunzo, Hoseth, Hodny, Jamison, Catts, and Bachmar 1992; Catts, Hodny and Custer 1989).

The Darrach Store operated as such from 1778 to 1805, and from the latter date until its demolition in the late 1860s was a tenant house. A 25% plowzone sample was taken of the one-acre site and almost 240 features sampled, yielding at least 6,000 artifacts. The store functions of this and the Boyd's Store are therefore not contemporaneous, but this study provides a solid starting point for the development of the research program at the Boyd's site. In addition to undertaking a detailed analysis of the site itself, this study included comparative architectural and archaeological data from store sites in Delaware and Maryland that has been used in the present study.

Among the research issues successfully addressed at Darrach through archaeology were the history of the landscape and the manner in which it reflected the tenancy and ownership of the property through time, the architecture of the store and its social and cultural meaning, and the material culture of the tenants and its implications. Historical research addressed the social and economic setting of the mercantile families of Duck Creek Hundred.

The William Dickson Site [7-NC-82] operated as a store *circa* 1780-1845. The building was then removed and second (tenant) house built on site. William Dickson, although a wealthy individual in his own right, was a tenant on this site.

The site was completely excavated, deploying 60 contiguous test units of varying size (Catts, Hodny and Custer 1989:128, 139-145). A total of 3,394 artifacts were recovered, 44% falling within South's "Kitchen" group. The large numbers of buttons, coins and ceramic sets recovered were asserted to be material signatures of the presence of the store (Catts, Hodny and Custer 1989:168-173). The store building was completely different from the substantial brick 18th- and early 19th-century structures built by Darrach, the owner of the Brick Store in Blackbird Hundred, the Cummins, Coombe and Pearson stores in Smyrna, and the Spenser Store near Chestertown, Maryland (De Cunzo et al. 1992:295-302). The Dickson store structure is a modest one-story frame building set on piers, 16 by 20 feet in plan, with no basement or cellar.

As is also the case with taverns – another common feature of the Delaware landscape – the above research shows that the term "store" is likely to be applied to a range of facilities from warehouse-type structures through formal buildings with specific plan types like the Darrach, Brick and Spencer stores, to more humble structures like Dickson. One objective of the research undertaken for the present project was to place the Boyd site within this "constellation" of properties.

2. Delaware Slavery Before the Civil War

The 1838 inventory of the Boyd property includes slaves. Slavery was becoming unusual in New Castle County by this date, and it was proposed to investigate this issue through both focused archaeological work and through contextual historical research. Research to date however suggests that the Boyd's site has neither archaeological nor documentary data of sufficient volume and character to warrant extensive further analysis, therefore additional work on the topic of slavery was not undertaken as part of the current study.

3. "Corners"

The use of the term "Corner" as a location identifier, normally twinned with a surname, is quite common in Delaware. A rapid internet search identified at least 15 examples, and there are probably many more.

Limited research was originally envisaged to identify places termed "Corner" in early 19th-century records as a research contribution, but on further examination this was not considered to be a research topic that needed to be addressed in this study.

4. The Farmstead

The relative importance of the farmstead operation and the store to the Boyd family remains unclear. All but one of the farm buildings shown on 20th-century as-built highway plans lie outside the right-of way, but it was considered possible that earlier structures would lie within the ROW south and west of the house/store site. Within these limitations, it was proposed to view the site as a case study of an individual agricultural household (De Cunzo 1992:235), particularly within the 1830-1860 time period. The research designs cited in De Cunzo 1992:238-236, as well as those for post-1992 studies such as the Moore-Taylor, Wynn and Wilson Lewis Farmsteads in Kent County (Grettler et. al. 1996), and the second phase of the McKean/Cochran Farm in New Castle County (Bedell et al. 1998), provide precedents and a contextual framework.

In actuality the limited exposure of farm buildings and work areas in the data recovery fieldwork limited the degree to which this site could be compared with other farmsteads, and also the extent to which archaeological and historical data can be integrated. Overall the site was not, in the final analysis, considered to be a good candidate for a strong research emphasis on this topic.